

PHD course: Comics – stories, culture, society

One of the most talked-about comics published in the last 10 years is not (that) funny, and it is not for children. In fact, it is about the Iranian revolution and a woman's life in a Muslim country. *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi is proof that comics as an art form have an enormous potential beyond what the common conception of the medium seems to be. Among many others works, such as Joe Sacco's journalistic reports from Gaza and Kosovo, Alan Moore's reconfigurations of the superhero mythos, Jason's melancholic pantomimes, and other autobiographical comics by Seth and Alison Bechdel, *Persepolis* demonstrates how the field of comics has matured and diversified. These comics and many others represent an aesthetic, narrative and thematic development that has been going on since at least the 1970s and has resulted in an impressive plurality and originality of comics as an art form and as a means of communication. Comics constitute works of art in their own right, while they at the same time interact with both new and traditional media, and with the societies of which they are part. In an ever more complex media landscape, the study of comics therefore contributes to a broadening of academic and public discourses about art, media, culture and society.

In an effort to strengthen the research into comics in the Nordic countries, we have formed the network *NNCORE*, a Nordic Network for Comics Research. As part of the founding meeting of this network we offer a PhD course for PhD students who either specifically include comics in their work or focus on the intersections of visual and narrative communication within other fields of research. The course is an integrated part of the founding meeting of *NNCORE*, but PhD students from outside the Nordic context are very welcome to participate as well.

The PhD students will participate in the general meeting that includes presentations and discussions of comics as works of art in their own right, and as part of the general media landscape and of social and historical processes (see below for a description of the specific themes to be discussed). The three-day meeting will include a separate session for the PhD students alone in which they will discuss their specific projects with some of the international scholars from *NNCORE*'s Advisory Board. Confirmed Advisory Board members who will participate are at this time (July 14) Bart Beaty, University of Calgary and Roger Sabin, University of the Arts, Central St. Martin's, London, and Ann Miller, University of Leicester. The founding senior members of *NNCORE* (Kai Mikkonen, Helsinki University, Margareta Wallinn Victorin, Linneaus University, Øyvind Vågnes, University of Bergen, and Anne Magnussen, University of Southern Denmark) will participate too.

Place and time: 27-29 October 2011 at the University of Southern Denmark, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense M, Denmark. The easiest way to reach the university from Copenhagen Airport, Kastrup, is by train (approx. 1,5 hours).

Requirements: Participants are required to send in contact information including institutional affiliation, email address and telephone number together with a description of their PhD project (max. 1.000 words), and an abstract (max. 300 words) for a 15 minute presentation of the specific subject that the PhD student

would like to discuss with the group. Deadline is 15 September 2011 and the information should be sent to magnussen@hist.sdu.dk.

ECTS: 2.

Costs: Funding from the Danish Research Council to *NNCORE* pays for the actual PhD course. The participants should therefore only pay accommodation and travel. *NNCORE* covers the costs of hotel and travel for those of the PhD students who were part of the funding application to the Danish Research Council. If you have any questions about this, please contact Anne Magnussen.

Registration and information: Please contact Anne Magnussen magnussen@hist.sdu.dk. The registration deadline is 15 September, 2011.

The main part of the meeting will be based on the following six themes. The specific PhD projects do not necessarily have to fall into one of these specific themes, and if you have questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact Anne Magnussen, magnussen@hist.sdu.dk

[A] Telling stories, challenging convention

With this theme, the focus is on the way in which comics communicate narratives within complex networks of visual and textual signs, activating time and space in ways that are unique for the comics medium. Comics are studied as narratives, contributing to the understanding of specific comics and of comics as a medium, but also more generally, to narrative theory and to the transmedial characteristics of today's media landscape. The theme includes a focus on how the specific ways of telling stories in comics influence ways of imagining the world.

[B] Comics in between: Intertextuality and inspiration

As a multimodal medium, comics are positioned at the intersection of different media, drawing on literature, film, visual art generally, and more recently, the Internet. With this theme, focus is on the ways in which different media interact and inspire each other through references, copies, pastiche, caricatures etc. and discuss how this intertextuality/intermediality shape both comics and other media.

[C] Contesting – and creating – identities and communities

Traditionally, many comics especially for children have participated in reproducing dominant national identities, but especially within the last 15 years, the medium has started more consistently to question these identities through counter narratives and the inclusion of the individual and of minorities. The emergence of many comics (auto)biographies is one excellent example of this. Another is comics that focus on conflicting national pasts and memories. With this theme, focus is on this development from different historical and geographical perspectives.

[D] The power of comics: propaganda and censorship

The theme focuses on how comics have been said to explicitly influence society, as political and social critique; as state propaganda or as a potentially damaging influence on children. With this theme, we

include both current and historical perspectives, with examples such as war propaganda and the 1950s debates about comics as a bad influence on children.

[E] Manga and the globalization of comics

Due to its intermedial nature contemporary comics have become a global phenomenon, and comic cultures around the world influence each other in style and themes. This has been particularly significant in regards to Japanese Manga, which has become one of the most popular comic genres in Europe, the US, as well as in other Asian countries. With this theme, focus is on Japanese and other Asian comics as a popular cultural phenomenon in its own right, as well as focus on the mutual interaction of comic cultures in a globalized context.

[F] Learning from and through comics: comics as a didactic tool

Comics hold a didactic potential due to their specific ways of telling stories in combinations of word and image, and the group will discuss how comics can be used on all educational levels, incl. a focus on visual literacy.